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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 CARACAS 001751

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SUBJECT: CHARGE'S MEETING WITH MFA VICE MINISTER VALERO -  
DECEMBER 19

Classified By: A/POLITICAL COUNSELOR DANIEL LAWTON,  
REASONS 1.4 (B) AND (D)

¶1. (C) Summary. Charge met December 19 with MFA Vice Minister Jorge Valero to press the Government of the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuelan (GBRV) to resolve ongoing reciprocity issues and to sound out the GBRV's possible interest in a confidence-building dialogue on defense issues. Charge argued that it is in both the USG's and GBRV's interest to resolve reciprocity problems now before the inauguration of a new U.S. administration so that both countries can start work on a more positive bilateral agenda. He urged the GBRV to start thinking now about the possibility that both the Venezuelan and new U.S. president may attend the April Summit of the Americas.

¶2. (C) Valero professed to be unaware of ongoing reciprocity issues, but pledged to propose to President Chavez through Foreign Minister Maduro a two-step bilateral dialogue process. The first would address "normalizing" diplomatic ties, and the second would prepare a short agenda for a possible presidential encounter at the Summit. Valero was receptive to trying to improve bilateral ties now, but stressed that only "higher authorities" could authorize the MFA to undertake such an effort. Valero has expressed interest in bilateral dialogue since he became Vice Minister in late 2006, but he has yet to follow through. End Summary.

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Urging GBRV Action  
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¶3. (C) MFA Vice Minister for North American and Multilateral Affairs and GBRV UN PermRep Jorge Valero welcomed the Charge to his office for a one-hour meeting on December 18. Valero said that as UN PermRep he travels a great deal and intends to spend the majority of his time in New York, not Caracas. Nevertheless, he remains interested in promoting "dialogue" between the USG and GBRV and in improving bilateral relations. The GBRV believes the new U.S. administration offers a real "opportunity" to make progress. He asked to convey his regards to U.S. OAS PermRep Morales, noting that he had a good relationship with him. Valero was accompanied by Office Director Yaneth Arocha and USA Desk Officer Marie Borregales. A/PolCouns joined the Charge.

¶4. (C) Charge thanked Valero for the opportunity to meet for the first time. He reviewed for Valero the numerous reciprocity problems Embassy Caracas continued to have in the wake of the GBRV's September 11 expulsion of Ambassador Duddy, including the MFA's refusal to issue numerous diplomatic visas to many permanent and temporary duty personnel, the retroactive application of a measure to

prohibit the importation of eight-cylinder vehicles, and pending Embassy tax reimbursements of over \$250,000. Charge stressed that if the GBRV is interested in improving relations with the next U.S. administration, it is in the GBRV's interest to resolve reciprocity issues now, rather than keep them on the bilateral agenda for later.

¶5. (C) Charge also suggested that it would be useful to have a confidence-building bilateral dialogue on military issues. He noted that such a dialogue might include military representation at our respective diplomatic missions, the U.S. Fourth Fleet, U.S. counternarcotics operations in the Caribbean, any upcoming Venezuelan military exercises, Venezuelan military acquisition plans, and Venezuelan military seeking civilian training in the United States. Charge also mentioned counternarcotics, energy, commercial relations as possible areas for bilateral dialogue.

¶6. (C) In addition, Charge underscored the need to start thinking now about the April Summit of the Americas in Trinidad and Tobago, as both the U.S. and Venezuelan presidents may attend and could potentially have their first meeting. Valero said he expected Chavez would attend the Summit, just as he had previous ones. Conceding that the multilateral setting would likely allow for only a short agenda, Valero nevertheless agreed that it would be useful to start preparing early for such a possibility.

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Valero Receptive To Promoting Dialogue  
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¶7. (C) Valero seemed unaware and surprised by our continuing  
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administrative problems, but reacted positively to resolving them. He said President Chavez's recent television interview with former Vice President Jose Vicente Rangel developed a list of possible areas of bilateral dialogue, including counternarcotics cooperation, crime prevention, and counterterrorism. Valero said the other topics mentioned by the Charge may also be possible. He pledged to send to Foreign Minister Maduro a memo the same day proposing that the GBRV engage with the USG on a two-step agenda to first, "normalize" diplomatic relations, and second, prepare for a possible encounter between the Venezuelan and U.S. presidents at the Summit of the Americas.

¶8. (C) Valero also cautioned that such ideas will have to approved first by President Chavez, whom he said remains very interested in bilateral relations. He nevertheless opined that a series of "successive approximations" could be viable. Valero and his team said they were not aware that two Austrian planes reportedly sold to Venezuela's tax agency (SENIAT) had been stopped recently by Customs in Maine for containing equipment for which U.S. export licenses would be required. They requested details. Valero and his team Valero concluded by thanking the Charge' for a "constructive conversation."

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Comment  
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¶9. (C) Vice Minister Valero has been talking privately about promoting bilateral dialogue since he was named Vice Minister in late 2006. He has yet to follow through, although GBRV interlocutors continue to underscore an upcoming "opportunity" with the new U.S. administration. With his attention focused on his UN PermRep responsibilities in New York, it is also not clear whether Valero is well positioned to assist.

¶10. (C) Finding a GBRV interlocutor willing and able to improve bilateral ties may remain an issue if Valero cannot deliver. USA Desk Officer Borregales told the Charge that

former GBRV Ambassador to the United States Bernardo Alvarez has relinquished any role on bilateral relations. She said he is now devoted to his Banco del Sur responsibilities and may soon be named a Vice Minister of Finance.

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